

**Socio-Cultural Influence of the Dutch in the
Southern Province of Sri Lanka**

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Abstract

The Dutch interest in Sri Lanka rested mainly on its cinnamon and some other commodities such as elephants, pearls, gems, cardamom, pepper, areca-nut and coconut. If they were to acquire a monopoly on such trade and goods, it was a pre-requisite to establish an element of territorial power within the island.

The Dutch were successful in gaining some control over the commercial activities of the island especially in the coastal lowlands through the territorial power that they possessed in the Maritime Provinces. It was now necessary for them to safe-guard their commercial achievements in the new territory. Consequently, education, religion, language, jurisdiction including the social environment through architecture and even the dress and culinary styles were utilized as instruments to maintain and strengthen the sustainability of Dutch territorial power in the island.

The final outcome of such a process was due to the innovative changes that arose within the local community. The local inhabitants who lived in the area under the Dutch administration seem to have adapted their lifestyles in accord with the new situation, whether willingly or otherwise, perhaps to receive some social status or even material advancement in the changing circumstances. In this way, the Dutch made a substantial impact on the local social and cultural behaviour of the time.

In the course of time many innovations were brought about even in the socio-cultural ambience that had arisen during the Dutch phase. The Colebrooke-Cameron Reforms and later on the Nationalism and the Independence Movements largely affected the prevailing social structure that had been integrated into the local way of life by which much of the Dutch Colonial traditions were diluted. However, even today, traces of continued Dutch Colonial influences at a socio-cultural level are recognizable, which aspects, it is proposed to identify and highlight.